

COMMODIFIED IDENTITIES: A MARXIST READING OF CULTURAL AND CLASS DIFFERENCES IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the cultural and class differences depicted in Mohsin Hamid's novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist through a Marxist lens. Through the character of Changez, Hamid explores issues such as identity crisis, otherness, cultural displacement, and the class and cultural tensions faced by non-natives in America in the post-9/11 era. The study aims to examine the cultural distinctions that contribute to the discrimination faced by the protagonist, and to explore the factors, namely capitalist exploitation, alienation, religion, class gap, and imperialism, that give rise to these cultural and class differences. It further examines the strategies through which Changez navigates and resists this discrepancy, including cultural adaptation, resistance to assimilation, confrontation with Islamophobia and prejudice, and political awakening. A qualitative research method is employed to conduct this study, drawing on close textual analysis of the novel within a Marxist theoretical framework. The findings indicate that cultural and class differences in the novel are closely bound up with capitalist structures, social alienation, religious difference, and imperialist practice, all of which significantly shape Changez's experiences and identity, while his eventual disillusionment with the American Dream and return to Pakistan reflect a broader resistance to the commodification of cultural identity and to Western capitalist and imperialist ideology. The study concludes that The Reluctant Fundamentalist offers a critical representation of the complex relationship between culture, class, power, and identity in the post-9/11 context. The study is expected to enhance understanding of cultural and class differences and their effects in a globalized context, offering valuable perspectives for students and future researchers.

Keywords: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Cultural disparity, Marxism, Identity, post-9/11

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Mohsin Hamid is a British-Pakistani novelist, born in Lahore in 1971 and educated at Princeton University and Harvard Law School. His dual Eastern and Western heritage has exerted a considerable influence on his literary output, exposing his fiction to a broad spectrum of cultural sensibilities. Following his education, Hamid resided for an extended period in New York City, where he worked as a management consultant for McKinsey & Company. In 2007, he published his second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which portrays the socio-political climate in America before and after the events of 9/11, with particular attention to the psychological division experienced by non-native residents. This experience is articulated through the character of Changez, a twenty-five-year-old Pakistani who, having graduated from Princeton University, secures a position at the elite firm Underwood Samson. As the narrative

progresses, Changez is confronted with a series of circumstances that destabilize his sense of self and complicate his understanding of his own actions and identity. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a contemporary novel that engages with themes of identity crisis, cultural displacement, class disparity, religion, and the shifting attitudes of Americans toward non-natives in the pre- and post-9/11 periods. The novel further illustrates the harsh and discriminatory treatment endured by immigrants residing in America, who are frequently constructed as culturally "other." A Marxist theoretical framework is employed in this study to examine the conditions under which individuals within shared society experience alienation, as cultural differences give rise to concerns of discrimination, inequality, and retaliation. Through this novel, Hamid draws upon his own cross-cultural experience and narrative insight to make a distinctive contribution to contemporary literature. The present study undertakes a Marxist analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Marxism, as an economic and political theory, interrogates the inherent contradictions of capitalism and is grounded primarily in the work of the German philosopher and economist Karl Marx. Marxian economic thought centers on a critique of capitalism, as articulated in Marx's seminal text *Das Kapital* (1867), which contends that capitalism, as a system of economic and social reproduction, is fundamentally flawed and ultimately unsustainable. Marxist theory further elucidates how power hierarchies and social inequality are constructed within cultural contexts. Central to this framework, and to its application in the present study, is the concept of commodification. Within the novel, Changez's Pakistani identity is subjected to commodification, as he encounters marginalization and victimization on account of his cultural background within the commercial milieu of New York City. This study elaborates upon Changez's experiences and circumstances in America and undertakes a close examination of key scenes in the novel through the lens of Marxist theory, with attention to the cultural and class discrepancies it portrays. Accordingly, the study aims to demonstrate the cultural and class disparities depicted in the novel, with particular emphasis on underlying power dynamics, while also illuminating the strategies through which Changez confronts and resists these disparities.

1.2 Research Objectives

This research study aims to achieve the following objectives;

- i. To investigate, through a Marxist lens, the factors that give rise to cultural and class differences experienced by Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.
- ii. To assess the strategies Changez adopts to confront and overcome cultural and class differences in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions;

- i. Through a Marxist lens, what factors give rise to the cultural and class differences experienced by Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
- ii. What strategies does Changez adopt to confront and overcome cultural and class differences in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study adopts Marxist theory as a theoretical framework to examine cultural and class differences, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical context within which the narrative is situated. It facilitates a nuanced appreciation of the interrelationship between cultural diversity, economic inequality, and political ideology as depicted in the novel. Furthermore, the study contributes to students' comprehensive understanding of cultural clashes and otherness, and their broader implications for the lives of individuals, particularly immigrants.

2. Literature Review

The Reluctant Fundamentalist has attracted sustained critical attention for its treatment of cultural disparity, capitalism, imperialism, and the complexities of cultural exchange in the post-9/11 era. Through the figure of Changez, a Pakistani man navigating and resisting the multidimensional pressures of cultural identity, Hamid's novel has become a productive site for exploring how culture, economy, and power intersect to shape individual and social life within a capitalist society. While the novel has been examined through several critical lenses, its fundamental engagement with Marxist principles remains unaddressed in existing scholarship.

2.1 Previous Studies in the Field

The dominant strand of scholarship on the novel has approached it through postcolonial theory, reading Changez's experience as an allegory of colonized subjectivity. Parvez and Lashari (2018) position Changez as a hybrid, postcolonial subject who abandons his native culture for an adopted one and, in the aftermath of 9/11, comes to perceive himself as fundamentally "other." Bangash (2021) extends this reading through Edward Said's concept of cultural displacement, arguing that Changez's proximity to the "Occident" precipitates a loss of identity that renders him increasingly arrogant and rebellious, while Bibi et al. (2021), also drawing on Said's Orientalism, examine the psychological toll of the resulting native/non-native conflict. Khalaf (2022) situates this identity crisis more explicitly around Changez's recurring self-interrogation ("Who is he?"), reading the 9/11 attacks as the catalyst that reshapes his understanding of capitalist and imperialist culture in America, while Akhter et al. (2021) similarly trace the protagonist's identity crisis to the guilt provoked by his abandonment of his Pakistani heritage. Collectively, these studies establish cultural displacement and postcolonial otherness as the most heavily theorized dimensions of the novel, yet they consistently stop short of situating that displacement within the economic and class structures that this study argues underlie it.

A related cluster of scholarship reframes this displacement in terms of power and reception rather than colonial identity alone. Ara and Gul (2022) read Changez as a victim of American soft power, whose admiration for and pursuit of assimilation into American culture is ultimately rebuffed by a society that withholds full citizenship from him because of his ethnic and religious background. Shihada (2015) broadens this concern with reception to the treatment of Muslims generally, documenting how post-9/11 America constructed them as legitimate targets of suspicion and hostility—through racial profiling, media misrepresentation, and

detention—and linking this treatment to broader anxieties over citizenship, multiculturalism, and belonging. Rajab et al. (2022) situate this shift in a wider literary context, arguing that changed attitudes toward Pakistani immigrant families after 9/11 generated the suffering that made war and terror central preoccupations of contemporary Pakistani fiction. Bhat and Kalia (2022) synthesize many of these concerns—identity, race, class, media stereotyping, empire, and neo-colonialism—reading the novel as a meditation on the fraught relationship between the "Third World" and the West and on the post-9/11 stereotyping of Muslims as latent threats to Western civilization. Together, this body of work demonstrates that the hostility Changez encounters is not merely cultural but structural, tied to power hierarchies of citizenship and belonging—though none of these studies name or theorize that structural hostility as class-based or economic, the gap this study addresses.

Other scholars have turned to religious, psychological, and affective dimensions of Changez's experience. Hassan et al. (2019) foreground religious ideology and bicultural identity, situating the novel within diasporic literary sensibilities shaped by immigration and the loss of identity. Awan et al. (2016) adopt a psychoanalytic approach, comparing Changez with Darashikoh of *Moth Smoke* to trace how both heroes are reduced to pitiable, non-heroic figures by the crises they endure, and using this comparison to illuminate the broader pressures reshaping Pakistan's youth. A distinct sub-thread examines nostalgia as an organizing affect: Huq (2018) reads *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* alongside *Exit West* to theorize how war produces two paradigmatic figures—the terrorist and the immigrant—whose nostalgic orientation toward the past disrupts conventional narratives of the democratic state, while Ahmad et al. (2020) similarly trace how nostalgia, particularly in Changez's relationship with Erica, shapes both characters' identities and ultimately proves destructive to their lives. Vivek and Kaneri (2023) extend this attention to affect and identity into the domain of the everyday, using Roland Barthes' framework to show how culinary difference functions as a marker of ethnic and cultural identity within the Pakistani-American diasporic experience. Recent scholarship continues to apply diverse stylistic and theoretical frameworks to canonical and contemporary fiction alike, ranging from narrative pacing and suspense (Muneeb et al., 2025) to postcolonial and Marxist readings of identity and power (Ihsan et al., 2025).

2.2 Research Gap

Taken together, this body of scholarship establishes that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been read productively through postcolonial theory, soft power, psychoanalysis, nostalgia, and diasporic and culinary identity, with cultural displacement, otherness, and the loss or negotiation of identity emerging as the field's central preoccupations. What remains conspicuously absent from this literature, however, is any sustained engagement with Marxist theory. Existing studies gesture toward economic and power-based structures—citizenship, capitalism, empire—without theorizing them directly, leaving the novel's treatment of class conflict, economic structure, and the commodifying effects of global capitalism on cultural and class alienation largely unexamined. This study addresses that gap by applying a Marxist framework to the novel, offering a means of exploring the socioeconomic factors and class dynamics that shape Changez's experiences and identity.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, in keeping with the nature of the data under investigation. The primary data for this study are drawn from Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which is analyzed using Marxist theory as the guiding theoretical framework.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Major Factors of Cultural Differences in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores the complex and nuanced contrasts that emerge across cultures. Changez, a Pakistani immigrant in the United States, grapples with the tension between his cultural heritage and his adopted American identity. As he navigates the corporate world and confronts the preconceptions and biases of post-9/11 America, his sense of self is shaped by processes of cultural assimilation, economic mobility, and political awakening. The novel critiques the power relations underlying cultural exchange, with particular attention to the cultural expectations and prejudices imposed upon Muslims and Pakistanis in the United States. Through Changez's journey, the narrative illuminates the complexity of cultural identification and the challenges of negotiating multiple worlds, ultimately inviting readers to interrogate their own assumptions about cultural diversity and identity.

4.1.1 Capitalist Exploitation

Through Changez's experiences within the business world, Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* interrogates capitalist exploitation. Changez, a young Pakistani man, initially attains the American Dream upon securing a lucrative position at the prestigious valuation firm Underwood Samson. However, as he advances within the organization, his faith in capitalism erodes in the face of its inherent cruelty and exploitative nature. Changez remarks, "As I delved deeper into the world of high finance, I began to realize that the principles of capitalism were not always as pure as I had imagined" (Hamid, 2007, p. 120). The "principles of capitalism" here denote the notion that capitalism is founded upon fair competition, equal opportunity, and the generation of wealth through hard work and innovation. Yet Changez's tenure at Underwood Samson exposes him to the harsher realities of capitalist exploitation, wherein profit is consistently privileged over human welfare and ethical considerations are routinely compromised—an experience that unsettles his initial, idealized conception of capitalism as a noble and equitable system. This realization marks a significant turning point in Changez's trajectory, as he begins to question the values and convictions he had previously held.

Changez is employed by Underwood Samson, a firm specializing in the assessment of global business profitability, in the capacity of valuation specialist. Trained in corporate valuation and analysis, he becomes, in his own words, a "master of the art" of assigning value to that which is otherwise deemed priceless or immeasurable: "I was a valuation expert, a master of the art of putting a price on the priceless of turning the intangible into the tangible" (Hamid, 2007, p. 130). Here, Changez reflects on his prior role as a valuation specialist at Underwood

Samson, where he was trained to assess and quantify the worth of businesses. As the narrative unfolds, Changez's initial enthusiasm for this work gives way to a critique of capitalist exploitation and objectification, revealing the less admirable dimensions of the system he had once endorsed. The novel thus underscores the ways in which capitalism sustains injustice and inequality, a dynamic embodied in the ruthless and arrogant disposition of the capitalist elite—most notably through Changez's mentor, Jim, whose directive to "get the fundamentals right" becomes, within this context, an indictment of capitalism's prioritization of profit over people. Changez's own exploitation, in this sense, mirrors the broader exploitation of businesses and laborers enacted by the firm itself.

4.1.2 Alienation

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, alienation emerges as a central factor underlying cultural discrepancies, engendering in Changez a sense of disconnection from both his Pakistani heritage and his American surroundings. His estrangement from American society is rooted in the cultural and political climate that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11, during which he encounters xenophobia, racism, and discrimination that progressively erode his sense of belonging. This rejection by American society prompts Changez to retreat toward his cultural origins, such that his alienation paradoxically reinforces his Pakistani identity. As he states, "I was trapped between two words, unable to fully either one" (Hamid, 2007, p. 122). This statement captures the protagonist's inability to resolve the conflict between his American environment and Pakistani heritage; he becomes estranged from his own cultural background while simultaneously struggling to reconcile his identity with his life in America. Changez further experiences social discrimination and exclusion from both the Pakistani and American communities, a dynamic epitomized in Jim's remark: "You are a talented kid, Changez, but you are not one of us. You are not an American" (Hamid, 2007, p. 137). This statement is particularly striking in that it simultaneously acknowledges Changez's abilities and reaffirms his exclusion, prompting him to question both his place within American society and his own identity. His social isolation is further evident in his relationships with his colleagues and with his love interest, Erica, as his cultural and ethnic difference renders him a perpetual object of scrutiny and an outsider in the eyes of those around him. Consequently, Changez struggles to establish equitable relationships within this unwelcoming environment. This sense of isolation is compounded by the political climate that emerged after 9/11, in which his Muslim identity subjects him to heightened suspicion and surveillance, casting him perpetually as a figure of potential threat.

4.1.3 Religion

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* examines the role of religion in shaping cultural disparities, particularly through the experiences of the protagonist, Changez, as a Pakistani Muslim living in America. His religious identity exerts a significant influence on his broader cultural background, and the prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping he encounters as a Muslim contribute to his growing sense of disconnection from mainstream American society. The novel foregrounds the cultural divide arising from the conflicting religious beliefs and ethical frameworks of Muslim and Western societies. As Changez reflects, "But I knew that my

beard had been a mistake. It had marked me as a foreigner, an outsider, a Muslim" (Hamid, 2007, p. 145). Here, Changez reconsiders his decision to grow a beard, recognizing in retrospect that it functioned as a visible marker of his religious identity, one that positioned him as both a foreigner and a Muslim within American society. His beard thus serves as a powerful symbol of the tension between his Muslim identity and Western society, underscoring the broader difficulty of reconciling multiple cultural and religious identities in the aftermath of 9/11. This tension is further reflected in the eventual dissolution of Changez's relationship with Erica, precipitated by a cultural gap rooted in her inability to comprehend his beliefs and actions. Religion, in this respect, emerges as a central force shaping the differences between Islamic identity and Western society within the novel.

4.1.4 Class Gap

Changez contends with issues of class and identity as he seeks to establish himself within the American financial world. His journey begins at Princeton University, where he attends on scholarship and enters the privileged community of scholars. Despite his academic achievements, however, he is repeatedly reminded of his subordinate status as a foreigner and a Muslim, remaining excluded from the elite social circles and networks that his American peers take for granted. Following graduation, Changez secures a position at Underwood Samson, a prominent valuation firm, where he is trained to assess the worth of businesses. He comes to recognize, however, that his role extends far beyond the calculation of balance sheets or earnings: "Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. In fact, they did more than trouble me, they have eaten my nerves, they made me resentful" (Hamid, 2007, p. 34). This statement conveys Changez's sense of rejection, displeasure, and bitterness, emerging from the tension between his lower-class background in Pakistan and the financial success he attains in America. Changez's discontent thus stems from both cultural marginalization and economic disparity, with marginalization and exclusion generating in him a corresponding sense of hurt and resentment. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores class conflict in a manner that foregrounds the intricate and subtle relationship between cultural difference and economic disparity, positioning class struggle at the very center of cultural differentiation within the novel. The text further attributes these socio-economic gaps to imperialism and globalization, which perpetuate cultural dominance and thereby deepen cultural divisions. Through Changez's experiences, the novel illustrates how class struggle shapes the formation of identity and cultural affiliation, generates power imbalances, and gives rise to cultural conflicts rooted in hybridity.

4.1.5 Imperialism

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* engages with the affliction of imperialism, the conflict between East and West, and the difficulty of bridging the divide between the two. Imperialism constitutes a dominant theme within the novel, manifesting itself, in part, through power dynamics that generate cultural difference. This cultural imperialism is evident in the novel's portrayal of the erasure of Pakistani culture, which is supplanted by what is presented as the "American way of life"; Changez is expected to become increasingly American, while his Pakistani heritage is correspondingly devalued. This dynamic is captured in Changez's description of himself: "The streets of New York were a battleground, and I was a combatant, a

defender of the faith, a soldier of the American empire" (Hamid, 2007, p. 137). Through this passage, Hamid conveys a tone of bitterness, as Changez positions himself as a soldier fighting on behalf of the American empire within the streets of New York. In doing so, Changez constructs himself as "imperial," a term denoting active participation in imperialism. The depiction of New York's streets as a battleground suggests that imperialism functions not merely as a political or economic process but as an ongoing conflict between the imperial power and the colonized, one that shapes physical space and the lives of those who inhabit it. The phrase "defender of the faith" carries particular significance, implying that American empire pursues something akin to a quasi-religious mission to disseminate its ideology, thereby indicating that imperialism operates not only as a relation of power but as a social relation embedded within the structural fabric of society. The concluding phrase, "soldier of the American empire," offers unmistakable evidence of imperialism asserting itself through force to preserve its dominion; Changez's self-designation as "soldier" signals his implication within this system, even as it opens the possibility that those who benefit from imperialism may come to question its underlying principles and practices. This passage thus offers a comprehensive understanding of imperialism, illuminating its effects on personal identity as well as on the conflicted processes and authority characteristic of imperial power. Against the backdrop of American cultural dominance, Changez struggles to retain his Pakistani roots, feeling pressured to assimilate into American business practices and Western managerial principles, while his Pakistani heritage is increasingly cast as a potential threat to American interests. Imperialism, accordingly, plays a significant role in the unequal distribution of culture depicted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

4.2 Navigation and Resistance to Cultural Differences by the Protagonist

In Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist, Changez Khan, confronts a conflict between his Pakistani heritage and his experience in America. His efforts to negotiate and resist this cultural divide illuminate the broader tension between Eastern and Western conceptions of identity and belonging. Changez's experiences in post-9/11 America foreground this negotiation of cultural identity amid the prejudice and discrimination he encounters within American society. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in this respect, offers a thoughtful examination of these cultural differences and their impact on both individual and social life.

4.2.1 Cultural Adaptation

Within the framework of socioeconomic inequality and class conflict, Changez's struggle may be understood as a process of resistance and cultural adaptation within American society. Initially, he seeks integration into American society for the sake of personal and professional advancement, and this enthusiasm for adopting American culture can be read as evidence of the extent to which capitalism has shaped individual ideals and aspirations. Within a capitalist society, success and social standing are frequently equated with money, power, and material possession, and Changez's decision to enroll at Princeton University and secure a prominent position at a New York valuation firm accords with the ideals of success and upward mobility associated with capitalism. As Changez recounts, "Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (Hamid, 2007, p. 3), a

statement that reflects his initial excitement and sense of boundless opportunity upon arriving at Princeton, where he perceives himself as the protagonist of his own life.

Changez's integration into American society further underscores the themes of class conflict and alienation characteristic of capitalist societies. In adopting Western behaviors, dress, and lifestyle in pursuit of the capitalist ideals of success and social acceptance, he undergoes a process of distancing himself from his cultural origins and identity, coming to view himself as a "modern" and "enlightened" Pakistani seeking to shed his cultural identity in favor of assimilation into the American elite. This is evident in his admission: "I did something in Manila I had never done before, I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American" (Hamid, 2007, p. 65). Here, Changez seeks to bridge the cultural gap between his Pakistani heritage and his new environment by adopting American speech and mannerisms, though the qualifying phrase "as much as my dignity would permit" indicates his awareness of the risks inherent in this embrace of American culture. This dynamic illuminates central concerns of the novel, namely identity, culture, and belonging, and aligns with the Marxist concept of false consciousness, whereby individuals internalize the norms and ideals of the ruling class regardless of their own socioeconomic position. Changez's early adoption of American culture may thus be read as an instance of false consciousness, in which the prevailing ideology of a capitalist society, one that valorizes materialism, individualism, and the pursuit of wealth as markers of success, is absorbed and internalized. His pursuit of the American Dream, in this respect, reflects his embrace of these ideological constructs, notwithstanding the inherent flaws and injustices of the system that produces them.

4.2.2 Resistance to Assimilation

The dilemma of resistance to assimilation is explored in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the evolving experiences and perceptions of the protagonist, Changez. He initially arrives in the United States with considerable optimism and ambition, readily embracing the American way of life as he excels academically at Princeton and secures an attractive position at Underwood Samson, a valuation firm. This early phase of assimilation reflects Changez's desire to establish himself within American society and to capitalize on the opportunities it affords. As the narrative progresses, however, his initial enthusiasm gives way to disillusionment as he confronts the cultural and racial barriers that unsettle his identity and sense of belonging: "The desire to conform, to be like others, was a sort of death, a death of one's own identity" (Hamid, 2007, p. 145).

Marxist theory offers a means of examining the power dynamics, class conflict, and economic structures at work in the novel, with particular attention to Changez's resistance to assimilation. His rejection of the American capitalist system constitutes one of the pivotal decisions to emerge from his struggles over the course of the narrative, a struggle that intensifies in the aftermath of 9/11, when heightened prejudice and discrimination directed at his Pakistani heritage prompt him to question his identity and sense of belonging. As success within a capitalist system is contingent upon underlying power dynamics, Changez grows increasingly conscious of these structural inequities, ultimately leading him to reject the American Dream and its associated cultural values. This shift is captured in his own reflection: "I was a participant in

the global economy, a servant of the wealthy. But now, I was a rebel, a fundamentalist, an enemy of the empire" (Hamid, 2007, p. 182). Marxist theory posits a division of society into two classes according to their relationship to the means of production: the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who must sell their labor in order to survive. Within this framework, Changez may be understood as a figure representing the proletariat, or those excluded from the capitalist system, notwithstanding his initial position as a high-flying employee at Underwood Samson, where he functions as a "participant in the global economy" and "servant of the wealthy." This role situates him in relation to the bourgeoisie, not as an owner of capital but as a highly trained worker who benefits from the capitalist system, his valuation and consulting work enabling multinational firms to maximize profit through the exploitation of labor and resources from developing countries, thereby perpetuating global economic disparities. His rejection of the American Dream and his refusal to conform to Western ideals can accordingly be understood as a rejection of the capitalist principles underpinning Western civilization.

Viewed through a Marxist lens, Changez's critique of capitalist principles reflects his recognition of the exploitative character of a system that concentrates wealth and prosperity in the hands of a small minority while the majority struggles to survive. His rejection of the American Dream and resistance to assimilation signal his disillusionment with the capitalist system and his growing awareness of America's structures of oppression. In this respect, Changez's critique extends to American imperialism as well, as he seeks a more meaningful existence beyond the reach of Western dominance.

4.2.3 Islamophobia and Prejudice

The novel examines the complex challenges faced by Muslims in America, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, illustrating the ways in which they encounter discrimination, suspicion, marginalization, and stereotyping. The attacks reshaped Western perceptions of Muslims, particularly those residing in America, who were frequently cast as potential terrorists. The protagonist, Changez, experiences challenges, prejudice, and bias that exemplify the broader treatment of Muslims in America, encountering discrimination and racial profiling in public spaces such as airports and business settings alike. His Muslim background and appearance subject him to heightened scrutiny and suspicion, underscoring the growing ethnic profiling that characterized post-9/11 America. The narrative thus reflects the discrimination and denial of rights experienced by Changez on account of his Muslim identity, as Westerners, in the wake of the attacks, positioned themselves as superior and cast Muslims as inferior. As Changez recounts, "I had heard tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world, stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals, and I did not wish to have my position at Underwood Samson compromised" (Hamid, 2007, p. 120). This passage illuminates the consequences of the post-9/11 climate, a period in which Muslims were widely targeted and labeled as terrorists within the United States. As a Muslim employee at Underwood Samson, a prestigious New York valuation firm, Changez works diligently to advance within an intensely competitive professional environment, one shaped by the discrimination Muslims have historically faced, discrimination that intensified considerably following 9/11 and gave rise to widespread Islamophobia. Within this environment, Muslims experience anxiety, prejudice, and

mounting dissatisfaction, biases that manifest concretely in hiring practices and discriminatory dismissals. Those subjected to such prejudice consequently face serious repercussions, including financial instability and psychological distress, as feelings of marginalization and alienation take hold. Changez himself experiences alienation, frustration, and irritation stemming from his Muslim background and identity, compounded by the mental and emotional toll of repeated exposure to Islamophobic attitudes and actions. These cumulative experiences ultimately give rise to Changez's growing disillusionment with America and its professed values of liberty and equality.

Despite these hardships, Changez exhibits agency and perseverance in confronting the obstacles posed by racism and Islamophobia, affirming his humanity and dignity rather than succumbing to the negative stereotypes imposed upon him. He employs a range of resistance strategies, including self-affirmation, activism, and education, to counter the effects of Islamophobia and to foster greater empathy and understanding between East and West, seeking, through dialogue and engagement, to dispel misconceptions about Islam while promoting cultural awareness and mutual respect. Ultimately, Changez's encounters with prejudice and Islamophobia underscore the pressing need for greater empathy, tolerance, and solidarity in an increasingly interconnected world, illuminating the profound effects of cultural difference and societal bias on human lives.

4.2.4 Political Awakening

Changez's political awakening constitutes a crucial dimension of his resistance to the perceived cultural gap between his adoptive United States and his native Pakistan, as depicted in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As he navigates his existence in America, he comes to recognize and experience the consequences of American imperialism and capitalism, an awareness that ultimately leads him to critique and resist the dominant culture.

Changez's progression toward political consciousness unfolds gradually and with considerable difficulty. He initially embraces the American ideal with enthusiasm, regarding it as a path toward success and personal fulfillment, having arrived in the United States as a Pakistani immigrant to study and work. In this early period, he believes in the promise of American life and feels at home within his adopted nation. The events of September 11, 2001, however, mark a decisive turning point in his experience, as fear, anger, and misinformation give rise to a nationwide surge of anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani sentiment in the attacks' immediate aftermath. Changez reflects on this shift: "The world was not as simple as I had imagined... there were forces at work that I didn't fully understand" (Hamid, 2007, Chapter 6). This statement marks a pivotal moment in Changez's process of self-realization and political awakening, reflecting his growing awareness of the political and social dynamics shaping both his own life and the world around him. The events of 9/11 illuminate the destructive consequences of geopolitics, including the misunderstanding and discrimination directed at Muslims and Pakistanis within the United States, and prompt Changez to recognize the broader political, economic, and cultural forces that shape global events and personal identity alike.

This awakening is further articulated in his admission: "I had been blind to the darker side of America's global influence" (Hamid, 2007, p. 120), a statement that marks a significant turning point in his political development. Though initially enamored with America and its ideals as a Pakistani Princeton graduate, Changez comes, through his professional and personal experiences, to perceive the darker consequences of American influence on countries such as Pakistan, recognizing that America's pursuit of power and economic dominance has resulted in the exploitation and persecution of such nations. He observes, in particular, how American global dominance has contributed to political instability and corruption, economic exploitation and inequality, cultural homogenization, and human rights violations, an understanding that calls into question his earlier support for American exceptionalism and prompts him to reconsider prevailing national narratives. His prior "blindness," in this sense, refers to his original unawareness of these dynamics; as his awareness deepens, he feels increasingly compelled to speak out against injustice and to challenge established narratives, a political awakening that constitutes a significant dimension of his broader struggle with identity, cultural heritage, and belonging.

Changez further finds himself subject to unexpected and unwarranted suspicion on account of his heritage and appearance, experiencing firsthand the prejudice and mistrust directed at those who resemble the perpetrators of the attacks. This abrupt shift in attitude toward him and others like him proves deeply unsettling, undermining his confidence in the principles of equality and fairness that America professes to uphold. Changez's political awakening thus traces a trajectory from an initial desire to assimilate into American society toward a position of critical engagement with, and resistance to, American supremacy.

5. Conclusion

From a Marxist perspective, this research has examined the intricate interplay of identity, cultural dislocation, and power dynamics as depicted in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, offering a sustained analysis of the cultural disparities that animate the novel. This analysis reveals that Changez's struggle to reconcile his Pakistani identity with the capitalist ethos of post-9/11 America lays bare the deep cultural differences separating East and West, differences rooted in the commodification of cultural identity, in imperialist practices that perpetuate global inequality, and in social and economic structures that sustain Western capitalist ideals. Set against the backdrop of New York City's corporate world, Changez's experiences reveal how his ethnic background is rendered simultaneously invisible and exploitable, testifying to broader anxieties surrounding cultural supremacy and economic inequality, anxieties that the political climate following 9/11 only intensified, leaving non-Westerners further marginalized, alienated, and isolated. Changez's trajectory across the novel traces a shifting relationship between two competing selves. He initially seeks acceptance within Western culture, embracing its opportunities and values, yet as he grows increasingly estranged and positioned as an outsider, he comes to resist the cultural and economic pressures that seek to commodify and suppress his Pakistani identity, a resistance evident in his eventual disillusionment with the American ideal and, ultimately, in his return to Pakistan. This transformation reflects a broader rejection of the imperialist and capitalist ideologies that underlie both cultural and economic exploitation, and signals, more fundamentally, a refusal to privilege one culture over another. *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist thus offers a Marxist analysis of the intricate relationship between cultural difference and the political and economic structures of power, illustrating the challenge of bridging cultural divides within an economically globalized world governed by capitalist ideology. Changez's movement from assimilation to resistance brings into sharp focus the prevailing forces through which socioeconomic development shapes cultural dynamics and personal identity alike, underscoring the need for a fairer, more inclusive global society and a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between culture, economy, and power. In illuminating the cultural divergence at the heart of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, this study offers a nuanced account of how culture, economy, and power intersect, one that calls for a more holistic examination of cultural difference within literary and cultural studies and carries significant implications for how identity, culture, and belonging are understood in an age of globalization.

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